Cooperative Storage

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IN THE EFFORT TO CONTAIN and to service their continually expanding collections without incurring substantial additional costs, many libraries have resorted—permanently or temporarily, on- or off-site—to some form of storage for their little-used materials. From the individually maintained storage facility to the storage unit jointly owned and operated by several libraries would seem, superficially at least, a logical, economical and widely adopted transition. Yet cooperative storage, although the subject of a lengthy history and a voluminous literature, has been limited in realization.

The history of cooperative storage in the United States parallels that of cooperation in general; the latter has been so fully explored in print as to have become a cliché. Too, it seems to have become a virtue in and for itself, rather than simply a means of solving certain bibliographic difficulties. Library literature abounds with exhortations to librarians to work together; with lists of benefits, tangible and intangible, to be derived from these activities; with descriptions of efforts undertaken; and with evaluations, generally based on subjective judgments rather than upon carefully gathered facts.

It should be noted that any one cooperative practice has traditionally been bound to others. In the case of cooperative storage, mutually acceptable criteria for selection and deposit of little-used material, cooperative acquisitions, even cooperative specialization in collecting have been considered by storage proponents, thus broadening—and complicating—the scope of activity.

A scanning of the writing on cooperative storage (which obviously must include a considerable portion of that on cooperation as such) soon yields several conclusions: since its conception in the last century, virtually the same reasons for employing this technique have been advanced over the years. Arguments pro and con have remained constant, and examples of cooperative storage enterprises undertaken on any appreciable scale have totaled only three in number.

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To be sure, cooperative storage facilities have become the tools only of large academic and research libraries obligated to collect in ever greater depth and breadth, and to retain against future need those holdings which are no longer heavily used or which have not yet realized their usefulness. In his review of storage warehouses of all types, Jerrold Orne pointed out that small public libraries must emphasize currency in their collections.[1] Due to limited budgets and heavy use, books no longer in heavy demand are usually either outdated or in poor physical condition, ready to be discarded rather than sent to storage. Much the same applies to small college libraries whose holdings constitute working, rather than research, collections. Small special libraries whose holdings are limited in scope likewise need not concern themselves with storage.

While medium-sized public, academic and special libraries may begin to warrant storage facilities, "the storage library idea has attained its fullest development in the areas of the major public, academic and special libraries." [2] Thus it can be seen that storage indeed is a function of collection size.

Among those large libraries for whom cooperative storage might appear to offer solutions to their housing and organizing problems, a variety of factors have inhibited action. For example, planning for the Midwest Inter-Library Center (MILC) bogged down for several years due in part to "the constitutional inability of librarians to agree on anything, the inherent weakness of the storage library idea by itself, plus the basic philosophies of the librarians concerned." [3] Institutional pride, coupled with the desire to be able to provide locally and immediately whatever a faculty member or student needs, have been impediments. So has the reluctance to give up physical accessibility, thereby prohibiting browsing and the possible products of serendipity. Legal difficulties in the transfer of state-owned property have arisen. Concern has been voiced that supporting cooperative activities might prove detrimental to the local development of those libraries cooperating. Robert B. Downs, in discussing the Midwest Inter-Library Center said, "There is a fear, perhaps unjustified, that university administrators may use MILC as an excuse not to provide adequate support for their own libraries. Particularly in the case of buildings or building additions, the argument is used that nothing new is needed because any overflow can be transferred to MILC. Book funds might be affected. If such an attitude should develop, it could have disastrous consequences." [4]

In view of such deterrents, it may well be surprising that as many as, rather than so few as, three cooperative storage facilities ever achieved concrete development. On the other hand, the case for cooperative storage has been equally strong.

While the first printed mention of storage as a means of solving the problems caused by growing collections was made about 1893 by C. F. Adams, librarian of the Public Library, Quincy, Massachusetts, the first suggested application to academic libraries came at the turn of the century when W. C. Lane, librarian of Harvard University, raised the possibility of a storage warehouse for Harvard. Lane proposed a separate building in which little-used books might be housed, thereby freeing the library shelves of "dead wood." In his 1902 report to Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, Lane extended his proposal to include the Massachusetts State Library and the Boston Public Library.[5]

During that same year, President Eliot, in an address to the American Library Association on the problems of the Harvard Libraries, advanced Lane's proposal, adding that disused books should be housed in inexpensive buildings on cheap land, duplicate copies should be eliminated as far as possible, compact storage with fixed location by size should be employed, stacks should be closed, and records of books moved to storage should be removed from the public catalogs of the original owner libraries. While browsing would be eliminated, Eliot believed that the monetary savings would more than offset the disadvantages. As he envisioned it, expensive pieces of land around existing buildings would no longer be kept in reserve for future additions; indeed, the additions themselves would not be needed, since by retiring unused materials to storage the existing structures could continue to accommodate the living collection. Maintenance costs of a storage facility would be lower than that of the active library in terms of heat, light, number of attendants and cleaning; catalog handling and book delivery would be rendered quicker and easier and hence cheaper.[6]

Eliot's speech elicited great interest, much of it directed, however, to the use of the unfortunate term "dead books." A new main library was erected shortly thereafter, relieving the need for additional space, and the storage concept lay dormant until the late 1930s, at which time the need for additional space had become a major problem. Keyes D. Metcalf, then librarian, again suggested that little-used books be moved off campus to a low-cost, low-upkeep facility where

they might be housed compactly. In order to ease the cost to Harvard of the initial investment, Metcalf conceived of a cooperatively owned and managed warehouse, in which several libraries could deposit materials, thereby spreading the cost among a number of institutions.[7] Eight Boston-area libraries incorporated to form the New England Deposit Library in 1941.

Under the terms of the original agreement each member rented space in the building, selected, shipped, and shelved its own materials for deposit. Each member was to file cards for its holdings into the deposit library's union catalog.

Three types of storage were to be employed: permanent storage of little-used books available for use by anyone, temporary storage of books which would eventually return to the depositing library, and dead storage of books not available for general use.

Shortly after the opening of the library in 1942, Metcalf wrote, "It is hoped that cooperation between the libraries connected with the new institution will (1) do away with a good deal of unnecessary duplication that has already taken place, (2) prevent additional unnecessary duplication in the future, (3) provide for the advantageous disposal of the unnecessary duplicates, (4) help to bring about a suitable division of fields between the co-operating libraries as far as research material is concerned, and (5) make readily available to all the libraries the little-used books of any one of them." [8]

Consideration of a cooperative storage facility in the Middle West came about in the early 1930s when a group of college and university presidents within the region discussed the possibilities. Due to the Depression and the resulting lack of funds, the idea was temporarily dismissed.[9] In the late 1930s it was revived, and John Fall was engaged to explore the potential for a cooperative storage and distribution center in that section of the country.

The report of his survey recommended a deposit library "on the basis of the economies and useful services such a cooperative warehouse [would] provide [member institutions]." [10] The need for new libraries would be "reduced and delayed," permitting the accumulation of "cash reserves and credits which [could] be directed toward other needs, such as increasing the book collections, bettering services to readers, and improving library personnel." [11] As with the New England Deposit Library, such a facility would, it was predicted, speed service, permit elimination of unnecessary duplication, and allow use by all members of the titles deposited by any member library.

For the first time, the ideas of cooperative cataloging and of cooperative acquisitions were introduced.

The Fall report served as a basis of discussion during the next several years. In 1948, another survey was made, this time by E. W. McDiarmid, who called for a long-term program of library development to "make better provision for the total research need of the area and second, provide for economical and efficient utilization of existing and future resources to avoid duplication and needless expense." [12] To achieve these ends, McDiarmid called for an inter-library corporation, which would make it possible for every member institution to consider more intelligently the kinds of research programs it would offer, to make more effective use of its faculty through access to materials in all fields and not just those in the local library, and to select areas for specialization in research. Each member institution could elect for itself areas of specialization, and all members would be encouraged to eliminate wasteful competition, with the net result of expanding and diversifying graduate work within the region as a whole.

In 1949 ten research libraries incorporated as the Midwest Inter-Library Center, with the declared purposes being to establish a facility "for the cooperative custody, organization, housing, servicing (and for some materials, ownership), of little-used research materials"; to encourage and even implement "coordination of collecting policies for specialized fields, among the cooperating libraries"; and to permit exploration of possibilities for cooperative bibliographical services among the membership.[13]

In its buying programs, the center would purchase material only if it were not in or easily available to a member library, if it had research value within the region, and if it were little used. As for the deposit program, it was planned that insofar as possible, material would be merged into a single collection, the ownership of which would be given over to the center by the original owners. This collection would be arranged compactly by size. Legal problems in transfer of state-owned property required that four categories of deposit be established. Items in the first were gifts to the center; those in the second would continue to be the property of the depositing library, but would remain on permanent deposit in the center so long as it should last, with return to the owning institution only upon the dissolution of the corporation. Items in the third category, still the property of the depositing library, would remain on indefinite deposit.

Those items in the fourth category were to be housed in rental storage, for recall by the owning library whenever it wished.

The center was to pay storage costs for deposits in the first three categories, as well as their transportation, cataloging, organizing and shelving. The depositing libraries were to cover all costs for items in the fourth category, as well as packing and shipping their own materials in the other three categories.

The center reserved the right to reject offered material if it failed to meet the three conditions for deposit previously outlined. Too, when an offered deposit seemed more appropriate within another member library, the center might suggest this solution to the offering library.

While the Midwest Inter-Library Center struggled through its early stages, three New England colleges in close geographical proximity discussed a similar undertaking. In 1951 Amherst, Mount Holyoke and Smith organized the Hampshire Inter-Library Center "to accomplish for colleges serving undergraduate students, faculty members and a few graduates what the Midwest Inter-Library Center . . . accomplishes for a dozen large universities . . . with their elaborate graduate and research programs."[14] The purpose of the center was twofold: to release space for more heavily used materials, and to release funds to be used in extending coverage of lesser-used research materials by pooling backfiles and current subscriptions to specialized journals not in heavy demand.

Unlike the Midwest Inter-Library Center, which was housed in a specially constructed facility, the Hampshire Inter-Library Center was located first in the Mount Holyoke College Library, then later in the library of the University of Massachusetts, which became a member in 1954. In both cases, overhead costs were supported by the host institution.

It can be seen that all three warehouses derive from the same basic proposals, although in their development the cooperative storage concept evolved from that of a warehouse designed primarily to store little-used materials to that of joint acquisition for the purpose of extending regional resources.

In her dissertation, which considered the proposed and actual benefits contributed by each of the three facilities, this writer discovered that few of the stated gains had in fact been realized.[15]

By 1960, members of all three cooperative storage facilities had either added to their main library buildings, constructed departmental units or contemplated so doing, thereby indicating that cooperative

storage might defer, but could not eliminate library additions. Processing costs might have been reduced, as indeed they were for a time by Harvard, which sent 20 to 25 percent of its acquisitions directly into storage; [16] but under normal deposit conditions in all three centers, processing costs had increased instead, due to the added steps required to weed and deprocess books from the main collections and then reprocess them for storage.

While increased storage capacity could be gained through use of compact storage, only Harvard, of the New England Deposit Library members, employed size classes to any appreciable degree. Maximum capacity was not achieved at the Midwest Inter-Library Center, where by 1960 only one-tenth of the collection was stored by size. The New England Deposit Library had not eliminated unnecessary duplication, nor had it brought about division of responsibility for collecting research materials. While the Hampshire Inter-Library Center had eliminated duplication of little-used serial holdings, it had not apparently increased savings elsewhere. True, regional resources had been strengthened, but it is quite probable that the center merely formalized the working agreements that had taken place among the member librarians long prior to the center's development.

Many benefits suggested by Fall and by McDiarmid had not been achieved through the Midwest Inter-Library Center. Cash reserves had not accrued, partly because non-profit educational institutions do not build up reserves, and partly because the expenses of tax-supported institutions are met as necessary by the supporting bodies. Other unrealized aims were those of development and utilization of faculty skills; specialization in acquisitions and in graduate work; and consideration of types of research programs, either by individual members or by the membership as a whole.

The lack of sufficient data on individual library operations makes it impossible to compare costs of operations and services between participating libraries and the cooperative storage facilities of which they are members. Yet throughout the history of cooperative storage, certain factors have apparently been overlooked. For example, it should be feasible locally to produce conditions of reduced heat, light and staffing similar to those used in the cooperative facility, thereby permitting economies in maintenance to be effected as well on-site as in a joint facility. Another error lay in the idea that catalogs and catalog handling could be reduced through elimination of cards representing the titles shifted to storage. Indeed, decreased physical acces-

sibility demands an increase in bibliographical control over stored items, via the card catalog or an equivalent, in order to make such material accessible to all members. Obviously, increased bibliographical control would result in increased costs. Another benefit—increased accessibility to all members' deposits—has never been realized at the New England Deposit Library for the simple reason that bibliographical control in the form of a union catalog has never been developed. Finally, the argument that construction on inexpensive land is more economical than on expensive land overlooks the fact that land does not depreciate, that it is indeed merely a conversion of capital from one form to another.

In the decade since the aforementioned analysis, the three facilities have continued to operate with varying degrees of change. The New England Deposit Library now has ten members, of whom seven were charter members; other libraries have come and gone, using space only temporarily. For Harvard, even with some ten library units now in planning, construction or recent completion, the deposit library remains an important local storage facility. For other members, almost all of whom have added to their own library space, the deposit library either serves a needed storage function presently, or as a reserve against future demands. Refuting Eliot and bowing to the view that the serendipity of browsing is valuable after all, Harvard in recent years has abandoned its earlier practice of shelving by accession number within size class, in favor of shelving by subject classification within size class. Where previously the stacks were closed, users are now allowed direct access to the collections.[17] In other major respects, policies and operations of the deposit library remain the same, indicating that it is still simply a warehouse owned and operated by several members, each of whom rents space and handles its own collections as it sees fit.

The Hampshire Inter-Library Center, too, retains substantially the same purpose and operation as it did a decade ago, although the Forbes Library in Northampton has become a full dues-paying member, and Hampshire College entered as a contributing member in 1970. Emphasis remains on developing the serial resources available to center members through sales of pooled duplicates and through funds contributed by members for that purpose.[18]

The greatest change among the three has been in the Midwest Inter-Library Center, which in 1961 recognized a shift in geographical orientation and in direction by eliminating geographical restric-

tions on membership and opening full participation to any research library. While the deposit program continues, although on a reduced scale, heavy emphasis has been given to the cooperative acquisitions program. The transition in emphasis was furthered by the results of a center-authorized survey by Raynard Swank and Stephen McCarthy "to ask if the Center's activities were truly worth their cost to the members, to ask how well they were accomplishing their intended purpose, and to ask what it might do to become of still greater service to all of the nation's research libraries." [19] Their major recommendation called for the center to cease being a regional agency and to become a national institution.[20]

Too, they placed stress on the cooperative acquisition program because "cooperative, central acquisition before and in lieu of local acquisition offers the opportunity of substantial savings. The initial costs of purchasing, acquisition, cataloguing, and processing, are incurred once for the group of cooperating libraries, not several times, and the material is cooperatively housed and serviced from the outset. The further expense of discarding duplicates is eliminated." [21] This statement thus recognized that the originally stated economies of cooperative storage had not proved out in operation, while simultaneously endowing the center with a somewhat different, albeit not new, focus.

The expanded scope of center activities and collecting has been recognized through legislation introduced with the support of the Library of Congress to amend Title II-C of the Higher Education Act of 1965 so that second copies of important and current foreign publications might be purchased and deposited in the center as national loan copies. The Committee on Research Libraries of the American Council of Learned Societies, in its recommendations to the National Advisory Commission on Libraries, urged that the center be given federal support in order to build on the center's "already substantial collections" and "thereby enabled to provide ready access to materials that could not otherwise, or only at unnecessarily greater national expense, be made readily available to all research workers." [22] Accordingly, the center would effectively become a national library for the dissemination of research materials.

While relatively little attention has been given to the center in print in recent years, the scope of collecting and of services, together with the expansion of membership, may be appreciated by scanning the

center's *Handbook*.[23] Indeed, the center is well on its way to becoming, if it has not already become, a national resource.

Taken in sum, cooperative storage warehouses have been advocated largely on two bases: the economies to be realized, and the extension of resources to be achieved. History shows that the economies have not been made, but on the other hand, the extension of resources, in one instance, certainly has. However, the question should be asked whether improvement of resources through cooperative acquisition must take place as an integral part of a tangible facility, or whether cooperative acquisition, even cooperative specialization in subject collecting, could not be effectively pursued independently of an external physical entity. Perhaps the prime value of the three warehouses is their continuing testimonial to the fact that cooperation among libraries can indeed be achieved. If viewed as experiments, they can be shown to have made important contributions to the knowledge of possible means of resolving the storage problem. They should not, however, be looked upon as successful models upon which future storage facilities should be patterned. Instead, libraries attempting to find the same solutions sought by the advocates of cooperative storage would do well to investigate such other cooperative measures as those which are presently advocated or included as part of the storage facilities' extra-storage activities. Other possible alternatives, including such recent developments as communications networks of all kinds, should also be fully explored.

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